



Representative
**Sandra
Romero**



Representative
**Sam
Hunt**



22nd District

Dear neighbors,

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your representatives. Thank you.

We rarely do newsletters, but there is important information you need to hear about changes made to Washington's primary election. We'd also like to share information with you about health care reforms the Legislature considered.

Many of you are interested in the fate of specific bills and budget items; this newsletter is too short to include them all. Please call or write and we'll be happy to send you information on any legislation or budget item that matters to you.

Your comments and ideas are important to us. You can reach us by phone, e-mail or regular mail. We hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

REP. SANDRA ROMERO

REP. SAM HUNT

"Note: This is my last newsletter after 12 years representing our community, as I am not running for re-election. I want to thank you for the pleasure of serving as your voice in the House of Representatives."

Keeping in touch

Rep. Sandra Romero

PO Box 40600

Modular 1, Room 106

Olympia, WA 98504-0600

360-786-7940

romero_sa@leg.wa.gov

hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/romero

Rep. Sam Hunt

PO Box 40600

325 John L. O'Brien Building

Olympia, WA 98504-0600

360-786-7992

hunt_sa@leg.wa.gov

hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/hunt

Fixing the primary

Notice

Please note the legislation we passed deals only with the September primary election. The Legislature made no changes to the November general election. Voters will still be able to pick from candidates of multiple parties—any candidate they want—when they vote in November.

The problem

After the U.S. Supreme Court declared Washington's blanket primary — where citizens could vote for any candidate, regardless of party — unconstitutional, the Legislature had to come up with a new primary election system.

Washington was the only state in the nation with a blanket primary. California, Oregon, and Idaho have closed primaries where voters are required to register as Democrats or Republicans in order to participate in the primary elections. A majority of states require that voters list party affiliation in order to participate in a primary election.

In 23 states, voters who consider themselves independent or unaffiliated voters are not even allowed to vote in partisan primaries.

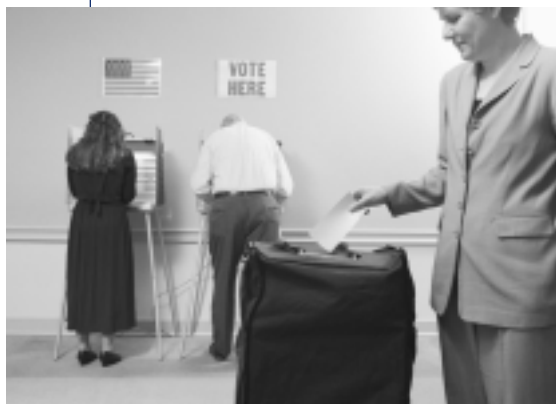
Montana primary vs. Top Two

In the Top Two primary system, only the top two finishers, regardless of party, go on the general election ballot.

The danger of the Top Two system, which Governor Locke vetoed, is that it would squeeze out all the minor parties, and in some cases, all but one party. Another danger is that the state's three major political parties had promised court challenges if the Top Two system became law.

We could have been left with the political parties holding nominating conventions rather than participating in a primary they did not support. In short, a Top Two primary was a recipe for chaos.

Imagine general elections where you could only choose between two Democrats, or two Republicans, and where third-party candidates never appear on the ballot. This could happen frequently with the Top Two system. For example, in 1996, state voters would only have been able to choose between two Democrats for governor — Gary Locke and Norm Rice.



We believe it's important to protect the citizens' right to vote for whichever candidate and party they want — Republican or Democrat, Libertarian or Green.

The solution

Gov. Gary Locke partially vetoed the bill, meaning Washington will have a Montana-style open primary, where each voter chooses a party ballot.

This allows Democratic voters to nominate Democratic candidates and Republican voters to nominate Republican candidates for the general election while maintaining voter privacy.



No record will be kept of what ballot you choose — so your privacy will be respected. However, each voter will have to choose one party's ballot and cast votes only for candidates of that party — Democrat, Republican, or Libertarian. This change will not effect non-partisan races. More importantly, all parties and points of view will still be able to have candidates on the general election ballot.

People in our district said they cared most about (1) providing all political parties with access to the general election ballot, and (2) protecting the privacy of their party affiliation. The Montana-style primary does both.

Voters have a right to real choices in general elections, and that's why we think the Montana-style primary was the best available option for Washington's citizens.

2004 session report

Health care

Patients are struggling with the high cost of health care and doctors are facing higher costs for malpractice insurance, which is directly tied to the issue of patient safety and medical errors.

We supported a number of bold reforms to improve health care to help patients and doctors.



Malpractice insurance for doctors

The House passed a budget that gave \$30 million in higher reimbursement rates to the doctors hardest hit by malpractice insurance hikes: doctors who work in emergency rooms or deliver babies.

These are the doctors in our communities having great difficulty getting medical malpractice insurance. The Senate disagreed and chose not to fund any of the \$30 million to doctors.

Some legislators wanted to put a cap of \$250,000 on what are called non-economic damages. These are damages such as permanent disfigurement, the inability to have a child, or other harm caused by medical errors which don't affect your income. For example, a child or a retired person can't show economic damages from loss of work.

As the related map shows, there is no consistent evidence that limiting

Patient safety

The House passed a package of legislation to cut the medical error rate and boost patient safety. We also voted to use \$19.1 million sitting dormant in the health professions account, money that could – and should – be used to reduce medical errors that lead to patient injuries and deaths.

These funds could have been used to improve our health care system. However, the Senate refused to vote on these reforms.

awards for non-economic damages results in lower malpractice insurance premiums for doctors. The limit on non-economic damages failed to pass, and would have required a constitutional amendment to enact.

Cheaper prescription drugs from Canada

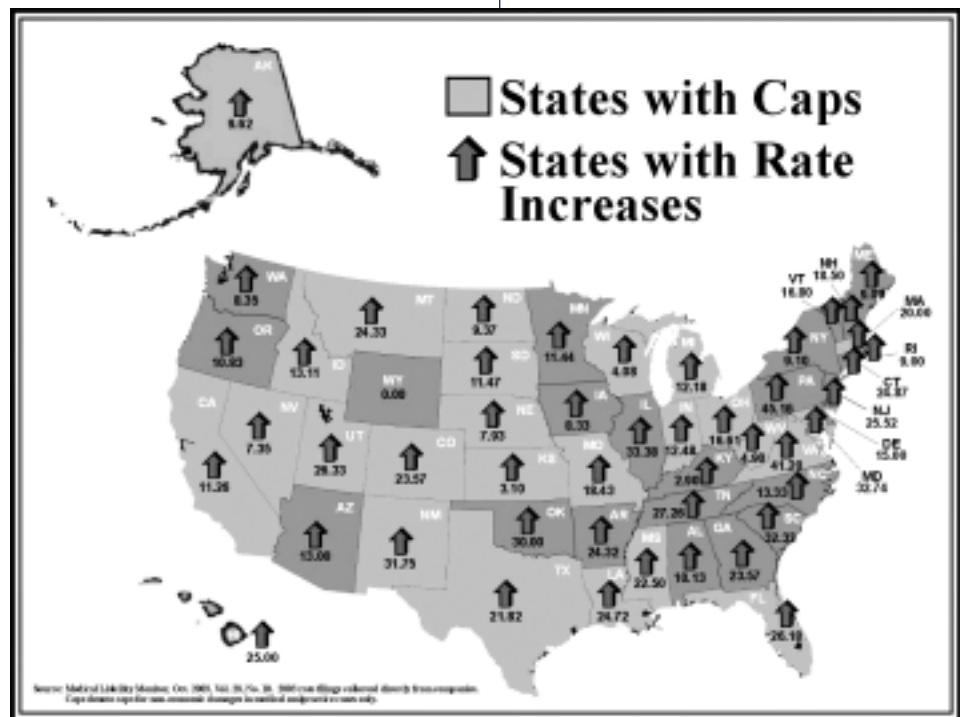
The state of Washington spent about one billion dollars – your tax dollars – on prescription drugs last year. The outrageous thing is we're paying almost twice as much as other countries for medicines made in the USA.



If we bought our prescription medicines from Canada, we would save 30 to 80 percent. Taxpayers could save about \$300 million a year.

We voted for a reform to buy prescription medicines from Canada, and the reform easily passed the House of Representatives – but Senate Republicans refused to allow a vote.

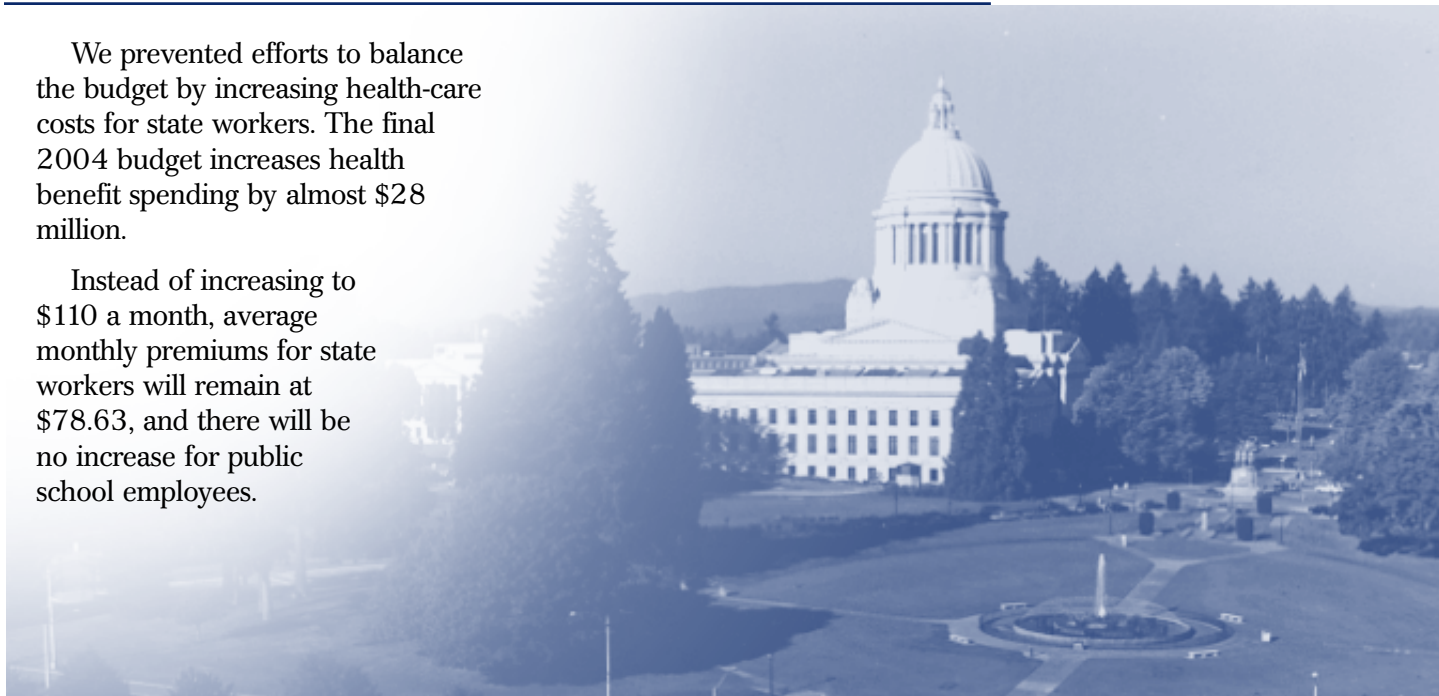
We'll keep pushing for this reform next year. It saves money and helps people get the medicines they need.



Holding the line for state workers

We prevented efforts to balance the budget by increasing health-care costs for state workers. The final 2004 budget increases health benefit spending by almost \$28 million.

Instead of increasing to \$110 a month, average monthly premiums for state workers will remain at \$78.63, and there will be no increase for public school employees.



INSIDE:

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Sandra Romero
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